



RSVP Connections

Connecting Senior Volunteers with Community Needs Fall 2008

"I'm doing what I think I was put on this earth to do. And I'm really grateful to have something that I'm passionate about and that I think is profoundly important."

Marion Wright Edelman

At this year's Tribute Day luncheon, 16 RSVP volunteers will receive the President's Call to Service Award, which recognizes individuals of all ages who have contributed 4,000 hours of service over a lifetime. 95 RSVP volunteers have achieved this high award since 2004.

The President's Call to Service Award refers to President George W. Bush's challenge to all Americans to make time to help their neighbors, communities, and nation through dedicating at least 4,000 hours – or two years – to service over the course of their lives.

We stand in awe of people who show extraordinary commitment --- a couple who has been married for over 60 years, an Olympic athlete who trains many hours per day for years, or a scientist or inventor who finally achieves success, perhaps after years of failed attempts.

Our 16 RSVP President's Call to Service Award winners explain why they started volunteering, and what has kept them volunteering for all those hours. Their responses reflect four common themes:

- **Personal values** – Each volunteer said that helping others, giving back, is simply part of life. Service is something they have done all their lives, whether in the military, their children's schools, their churches, or their neighborhoods.
- **The people** – Volunteers talked about their enjoyment of, and respect for, the people at the agency, the other volunteers, and the people that they serve.
- **Staying involved and engaged** – "It gets me off the couch" joked one volunteer. Volunteering is a way to be active, "keep the gray matter healthy", and keep in touch with the world and the community.
- **Humility** – "Don't make me out to be a hero" admonished one volunteer. "They're doing me a favor by having me as a volunteer," said another.

Vince Lombardi said, "Individual commitment to a group effort -- that is what makes a team work, a company work, a society work, a civilization work." I think the Coach would have applauded our 16 award winners. Read on to find out more about them...

Pat Dowling, Director

CONGRATULATIONS TO THE **1,286 RSVP VOLUNTEERS**
SERVING **194,304 HOURS OF SERVICE** FROM JULY 2007- JUNE 2008---
THE HIGHEST NUMBER OF HOURS IN A 12-MONTH PERIOD!

The 2008 President's Call to Service Awards go to ...

Joseph Moreno started volunteering at the VA as a way to repay a kindness. "I was having a difficult time, and two old-time veterans helped me to get back up. When things were better, I wanted to show them how much I appreciated their help. They said that the way to do this was to help veterans as a volunteer at the VA Medical Center." Joe, a US Marines veteran, became a volunteer dispatcher for the DAV Van Transportation Network. From his desk there, he listened to the stories and concerns of veterans and their families, and tried to help in any way he could. He was particularly moved when a veteran or the spouse of veteran would come up to him later and say "Thank you for all you did for me (or my husband)." Like many volunteers, Joe's service extends in many directions, including serving as his detachment's chairman for the Toys for Tots campaign.

"I've been through so many surgeries and illnesses. I guess I'm still here on this earth so I can serve others."

As a long distance truck driver, **Robert Thompson** has driven more than 3 million miles. When he retired from trucking and moved back to his hometown of Buffalo, he just kept on driving, but this time as a volunteer at the VA Medical Center. Robert was a volunteer driver for the DAV Van Transportation Network for 3 years, bringing veterans to medical appointments at the VA. After that, he drove the parking lot shuttle, bringing patients, visitors, and employees from the far reaches of the busy parking lot to the hospital's front door. Today, Robert volunteers at the VA 5 days per week, arriving at 6:30am. This WW II vet divides his time as a dispatcher in the DAV Transportation program, and activities assistant for the adult day program. "I play Big Band music, World War II music ...They love it, because that's their era."

"I've been blessed by grateful people so many times, that I guess I'll go straight up to heaven one day!"

Many years ago, **Casey Napierala** spent several months as a patient in the VA hospital. When he recovered, a staff member who had helped with his rehabilitation suggested he return as a volunteer. 11 years later, Casey still volunteers 3 days a week with that staff member, Joanne Clemente, supervisor of the VA Adult Day Health Care (ADHC) program- assisting by escorting patients to appointments; passing out lunch trays; recreational activities and socializing with fellow veterans. Joanne has one word for her outstanding volunteer: GREAT! "He is a very dedicated and dependable volunteer and makes a positive difference in the lives of the staff and patients in ADHC. His loyalty to the program and his fellow veterans is greatly appreciated!" Casey, a retired postal worker; arrives at the VA at 7am ("so I get a good parking space!") "All the people are so friendly. You can kid around with the guys and have a good time. We even play pinochle! They bring in some of the pictures from the War, and it's nice to see. We have people in their 90's, people who are blind or disabled in some way--- I try to help them and they appreciate it so much."

When **John Russo** provides hospitality services for blood donors at the American Red Cross, he also provides inspiration. Since his first blood donation in 1942, John has donated almost 77 gallons of blood. What's more, he has donated more blood components through the apheresis process than anyone in the NY-Pennsylvania region! John enjoys his time helping out two days per week in the canteen at the Red Cross donation site.

“It’s a lot of fun. I’m retired but not dead!”

“It’s good to get out of the house. The nurses are fabulous, and I enjoy meeting the people. What’s more, it’s good exercise for me.” At 85 years old, John attributes much of his good health and mobility to the fact that he walks a lot and stays involved.

Daniel Gibson was donating blood in 1992 at the American Red Cross when he saw a sign that read “Looking for Volunteer Drivers”. Since then, Daniel has driven vital blood supplies to Rochester, Pennsylvania, and all other points in the region. Dan generally drives 2 days per week, but he’ll be there on other days if he’s needed. Dawn Murray, Red Cross volunteer coordinator for blood services, knows the value of an extraordinary volunteer like Dan. “When there’s a cancellation, I can pick up the phone and volunteers like Dan will make it work. Everything we do is time-sensitive, and these volunteers are there to make it run like clock-work.” On completing 4000+ hours: “The people are nice, and I enjoy the drive.”

After **Julius Tatar** retired in 1975, he and his wife filled their lives with service to the poor at programs such as Little Portions Friary (a shelter for homeless people), Loaves and Fishes, and Friends to the Night People. They also travelled to European countries to help start up similar programs for the poor there. After his beloved wife died, Julius continues their tradition of service “It gives me something to do. And I can help to reach out and touch the ones who are struggling.” Bill Roberts, the Executive Director of Operation Good Neighbor, is awed by the

“We’re here to serve, not to be served. That’s my calling.”

service and humility of **Julius Tatar**. “We absolutely depend on him. He gives far more hours of service than anyone. He is the official dishwasher, mops the floors, picks up donated food, clothing, or furnishings, and many other tasks 5 days per week. Yet he believes that Operation Good Neighbor is doing him a favor by having him as a volunteer.”

When **Mid Leininger** moved to Buffalo, she brought along years of experience in health care at the University of Pittsburgh Medical Center. Missing friends and activities in Pittsburgh, she decided to try volunteering as a way to meet people in her new town. With her background in health care, she called Roswell Park Cancer Institute --- and it proved to be a perfect match. Mid volunteers 5 days per week in the Employee Health office, organizing and updating health files for over 3,000 employees and 600 volunteers. Susan Siegel, Volunteer Director at Roswell, noted that the staff depends on this petite dynamo tremendously. They gave her a birthday party, and when she was in the hospital, visited her. In turn, Mid appreciates her new circle of friends. Recently recovering from a serious illness, she said, “I found a niche at Roswell, and I can’t wait to get back.”

The choice of where to volunteer was easy for **Rhea Vogt** --- a hospital. She has been a registered nurse since 1947, and her nursing experiences have ranged from an Army nurse, to an operating room, a doctor's office, and even the first RN employed by Busch Gardens in Florida.

“Volunteering makes me feel like my life is worthwhile. In a way, I’m being selfish, because I’m able to fulfill my life’s passion.”

Rhea now volunteers at the front desk of TLC Lakeshore Hospital, and also helps out in the Staff Development office. She most enjoys the interaction with patients and families. “I missed my profession after I retired,” she admits, “and volunteering at the hospital helps. I also feel good that I’m using my gray matter.”

Roger Throm loves being out in nature, so spending time as a volunteer at Beaver Meadow is just a way to do what he enjoys. He began as a tour guide, leading groups of school children on nature preserves. He still conducts tours on occasion, but spends most of his time working alongside a group of like-minded volunteers, clearing the trails, repairing buildings, or doing other outside maintenance work. “You learn as you go along,” he explained. “I’ve learned so much from the staff and volunteers there. That’s what keeps me coming to Beaver Meadow--- the group of people there are remarkable. Sometimes we kayak or hike together, and each experience opens up a new horizon.” In addition to volunteering at Beaver Meadow, Roger drives a regular route for the Food Shuttle, bringing donated food to organizations that serve families in need.

Volunteers are the drivers, dispatchers, and the heart and soul of Rural Transit Service. In 2007, this army of volunteers provided 14,013 trips for 2709 individuals! This year, 5 RSVP volunteers at Rural Transit reached the level of 4000+ hours of service: **Robert Braun, Eber Inman, Norbert Koester, Clint Salmon and Joe Walters.** When asked about why they began to volunteer at Rural Transit, and

what kept them there for so many hours, their answers included “I like meeting the people.” “I saw an ad for drivers in the paper, and I called.” “I just needed something to do.” “I’ve served people all my life.” They also share another lifelong commitment to service...When one mentioned that he had been a US Marine, two of the others responded “Semper fi” (the motto of the Marines). What a coincidence! Brenda Henderson, Executive Director of Rural Transit Service, commented that extraordinary volunteers like Robert, Eber, Norbert, Clint, and Joe are a tremendous asset for the organization. “They are wonderful people, very caring and giving of their time. They have such a presence here because of the time that they give and their commit-



ment to Rural Transit, and that inspires other volunteers. Many have been with Rural Transit since it started, and helped to build it up to where it is today. They live in the communities that we serve, and by volunteering, can help neighbors who otherwise couldn't stay in their homes."

Agnes Marquat's doctor once told her, "Just keep doing what you're doing." So twice a week, 90-year-old Agnes helps in the kitchen with the Erie County Stay Fit Dining Program at the Lancaster Senior Center. She also runs the Tuesday afternoon pinochle tournament and an occasional Chinese auction or other special event at the Center. An RSVP volunteer for 21 years, despite recent health problems, she hopes to return soon to her busy social and volunteer life.

jess (Majewski), a Vietnam veteran, spends a lot of time working on ships at the Buffalo & Erie County Naval Park, and occasionally giving tours. Sometimes, he'll overhear an older veteran talking to a grandchild about his service aboard a ship very much like the ones at the Park. "Veterans want to leave a legacy. We have had men here who were at Guadalcanal or Normandy. They want to keep the memory of what these men and women did, and what they went through." jess is proud of the many improvements on the ships as a result of work he and other volunteers have done. He notes that taking care of a ship is a priority for those who serve on it, because it reflects on them. "When you serve, you keep your ship neat. You'll always see guys chipping paint or scrubbing decks," said jess. "So when veterans like the Tin Can sailors (who served on destroyers like the USS Sullivans) come to visit, we want them to feel just as proud of the ships that they see here."

"We are losing so many World War II veterans every day, and it's important to teach our children about history, and keep it alive."

Your hours of service are important and make a difference!

Volunteers can submit monthly timesheets to the RSVP office in 3 different ways—
By mail, FAX, or e-mail.

- If you are using a **paper timesheet**, please make sure it is signed by you and your volunteer supervisor, and mailed to the RSVP office at the end of each month.



- If you or your volunteer supervisor wants to **Fax a timesheet**, our Fax number is **858-7259**.

- If you **e-mail** your hours to the RSVP office, include your name and volunteer site along with your hours. (It's not always easy to figure out a volunteer's name from an e-mail address!) Send to measers@erie.gov.

* If you volunteer at more than one site, indicate the hours being submitted for each site.

Please let us know if you have a change in mailing address, phone, or e-mail address.

Remember: the RSVP Advisory Board has established **40 recorded hours** as the minimum service requirement for invitation to Tribute Day—please be sure to turn in your timesheets so we may recognize all your wonderful efforts!

A Volunteer's Viewpoint...



*We invite our RSVP volunteers to send us your volunteer experiences, reflections and recommendations to include in the RSVP newsletter. This is your chance to spread the word about a volunteer opportunity that really stands out. **You never know who you will inspire!***

Send in your viewpoint by e-mail at dowlingp@erie.gov, or mail to: RSVP, Erie County Senior Services, 95 Franklin St., Buffalo, NY 14202

Barbara Blackburn is an RSVP volunteer at Niagara Frontier Radio Reading Program and a member of the RSVP Advisory Council. She wrote this article after the Advisory Council's "Diversity Dialogue", where the Council and active volunteers from the African-American and Hispanic communities discussed what volunteering means, how to measure the frequency and impact of volunteering in the community, and how to engage more people of all ages and from all neighborhoods in volunteering.

Volunteerism Re-Viewed by Barbara Blackburn

"The hands of God." That was how volunteers were defined in a meeting of the RSVP Advisory Council with individuals representing service agencies such as El Buen Amigo, We Care Community Block Club, Friendly Fruit Belt, United Neighborhoods, and more. The Council was there to listen and learn about cross-cultural perspectives on volunteering.

In some communities, helping others is not defined as "volunteering"; it is considered a duty, and often closely linked with a church. Acts of helping are not easily measured, and often not formally recognized. A woman described how a mother opened her house and her heart to young girls every Saturday and Sunday for sewing lessons. Another noted that when neighbors do not have much food, they pool their ingredients---and they suddenly have a pot of soup. To me, that's not only teamwork, but soul.

As a teacher at Erie Community College, I assigned my students to write an essay on volunteering (as an informal way of surveying their attitudes). I was surprised by the very positive responses of these "younger-generation" members, who are sometimes labeled as self-involved. Eighteen students in the class had volunteered in activities ranging from serving at soup kitchens, tutoring school children, helping out at Habitat for Humanity, Ronald McDonald House, and the Leukemia Walk, as well as church activities. Comments penned by the students about their experience as volunteers included phrases such as "a sense of satisfaction that you don't normally get in your everyday life", "a gratifying experience", and (my favorite), "It shows that you care for people outside of your comfort zone, and you gain respect for others." Another student wrote that "volunteering is offering yourself and expecting nothing in return, except maybe satisfaction for the deed."

My own favorite volunteering activity is reading from the newspaper for Niagara Frontier Radio Reading for people who are visually impaired. It's a fantasy volunteer job in which I imagine myself a celebrity in that little studio. Yes, that is a perk for me!

Measuring volunteerism in a community is a very difficult task, but it is certain that the results of volunteering build community. Volunteering is like a great crazy quilt, not always organized, but always giving warmth and beauty.

“What does love look like?

*It has the hands to help others. It has the feet to hasten to the poor and needy.
It has eyes to see misery and want. It has the ears to hear the sighs and sorrows of men.
That is what love looks like.”*

St. Augustine

RSVP proudly announces new partnerships with four organizations that share a mission of service-- to provide for people in our community who lack adequate food or shelter. Below are brief descriptions of the organizations and some of their current pressing volunteer needs:

Little Portion Friary is a temporary shelter for homeless adults, operated by volunteers only for over 25 years. A large house located at 1305 Main Street (near Bryant) in Buffalo, Little Portion brings together workers, donors, and guests in an effort to meet basic needs for food, shelter and clothing, and to see that each guest takes his or her own steps toward a more stable life. Needed are: **Handyman** a few hours per month, for light carpentry, plumbing, and other tasks around the house and yard; **Cook** Once a month, or more often if preferred. Food is provided and can be cooked in your home or in the Friary kitchen. Cooks serve dinner family style at 5:15 pm and NO clean-up is involved; **Laundry assistant** a few hours per month at the Friary; **Front desk/admissions** – different shifts available, help needed most on weekends/evenings. Perfect for volunteer with background in social services.

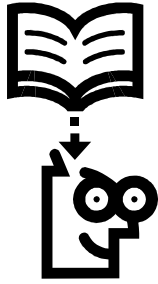
Food for All – Network of Religious Communities at 1272 Delaware Avenue near Gates Circle operates a food pantry to provide 3 days of emergency food, serving over 1,000 low-income working individuals and families, immigrants, refugees, victims of fire, the recently unemployed and elderly. Needed: **Food pantry assistant**: 9:15 am – 1:15 pm, weekly or every other week Pantry intake, packing bags, stocking shelves; **Nutrition outreach helper** a few hours per month. Answer phones, pre-screen for food stamp eligibility and mail application; Follow up phone calls as needed.

University Presbyterian Food Pantry – University Presbyterian Church at 3334 Main Street (corner of Niagara Falls Blvd.), serves 322 hungry people every month. Volunteers are especially needed during the winter months. Free off-street parking is available next to the church. Needed: **Food pantry assistant** to work one Tuesday or Thursday afternoon per month. Duties include waiting on customers, packing food bags and restocking shelves.; **Bookkeeping assistant** a few hours per week.

VIVE, Inc. Refugee Shelter– in a school building at 50 Wyoming Avenue in Buffalo, VIVE provides temporary shelter for refugees fleeing war and persecution in their homelands. VIVE volunteers strive to normalize the refugees’ situations as much as possible, give safe room and board, as well as legal aid to help them continue their journeys to their new homes. Needed: **Registration assistant** 9am – 2pm, one day per week. Help register and process refugees. Skills require good communication, filling out forms accurately, and computer input. Foreign language skills (especially French and Spanish) are helpful but not necessary; **Children’s activity leader** a few hours per day, weekly or every other week. Help run constructive learning activities such as reading, crafts, etc. for a variety of children’s ages.

UNIVERSITY EXPRESS – *Get on board!*

RSVP's Lifelong Learning Program has a new name, and a new partner! "University Express" is an exciting partnership between Niagara University Continuing Education and RSVP to bring stimulating academic to older adults. University Express is offered at senior centers and other sites throughout Erie County, and now Niagara County too. There is always plenty of free parking. Classes are free or have a low registration fee.



This fall, learn more about local history, wind energy, weather or finance. Join a lively discussion on Iraq, the European Union, homeland security and the U.S. border, and US-China trade policy during the Great Decisions series. Or take a guided tour of Shea's Performing Arts Center, led by the consultant in charge of the restoration efforts. Or sign up for one of our other lectures or short courses. **For more information**, or to receive the full University Express schedule, call the

RSVP office at 858-7548, or go online at www.erie.gov/rsvp.

We are also seeking "pro"fessors for the spring 2009 semester. If you are well versed in a topic and want to share your knowledge in a classroom of inquiring older students, call 858-7548 or email dowlingp@erie.gov.

A round of applause to---

- **Marilyn Greiten**, RSVP volunteer at Heathwood Health Care Center for being named as the organization's "Volunteer of the Year".
- **Robert Lee Brunelli**, Rural Transit Service, Inc. for being recognized by the NYS Office for the Aging during Older Americans Month in May 2008 for his role in keeping seniors independent through his commitment to this volunteer transportation program.
- RSVP staff member **Blanca Rodriguez**, for being recognized by NYS Senator Antoine Thompson as part of the 1st Annual WNY Hispanic Heritage Award Ceremony for her outstanding contributions in the field of entertainment .

Thanks. . .

From SABAH to **RSVP volunteers at the Grand Island Golden Age Center** –"Thanks so much for your help this year. The volunteers have been wonderful and incredibly helpful with our mailings." Kelly Mazella, SABAH (Skating Athletes Bold at Heart)

Don Chretien, RSVP volunteer with HIICAP, from a senior who received assistance with understanding health insurance options: ""His explanations, encouragement and patience have culminated in the change.....Thanks so much for putting into place this well-informed and very kind volunteer. It was a complicated situation and after many consultations, the transition has been made and I am so pleased."

To the **RSVP Volunteer Sewers (Ladies of Charity, West Seneca Sr. Ctr., and Lutheran Church Home)** many thanks from Women and Children's Hospital, Sisters Hospital, EC Foster Care Program for the quilts, hats, and sweaters for the children.

If you'd like to be notified of **one-time opportunities to volunteer**, please send your email address to patricia.dowling@erie.gov. We promise...no jokes, chain letters, recipes, etc.